DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 304 626 CG 021 500

AUTHOR	Hoover, Robert M.
TITLE	Counselors' Use of Tests: Process and Issues. Highlights: An ERIC/CAPS Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	88
CONTRACT	R188062011
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Computer Assisted Testing; Confidentiality; *Counseling Techniques; Counselor Qualifications; *Ethics; Scores; *Test Interpretation; Test Selection; *Test Use
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

This digest on test uses in counseling discusses the selection, administration, and scoring of tests; the interpretation of test results; and communication of results to clients. It examines such issues in testing as confidentiality, counselor preparation, client involvement in the testing process, computerized testing, and ethics. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

HIGHLIGHTS ...An ERIC/CAPS Digest

ED304626

Counselors' Use of Tests: Process and Issues

Counselors use tests generally for assessment, placement, and guidance, as well as to assist clients to increase their self-knowledge, practice decision making, and acquire new behaviors. They may be used in a variety of therapies—e.g., individual, marital, group, and family—and for either informational or non-informational purposes (Goldman, 1971). Informational uses include the gathering of data on clients, assessing the level of some trait, such as stress and anxiety, or measuring clients' personality types. The purpose of non-informational tests is to stimulate further or more indepth interaction with the client.

Although the published literature on testing has increased, proper test utilization remains a problematic area. The issue is not so much whether a counselor uses tests in counseling practice, but when and to what end will tests be used (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1984).

Testing Process

Steps involved in the process of using tests in counseling include the following:

- Selecting the test.
- Administering the test.
- Scoring the test.
- Interpreting the results.
- Communicating the results.

Selecting. Having defined the purpose for testing, the counselor looks to a variety of sources for information on available tests. Resources include review books, journals, test manuals, and textbooks on testing and measurement (Anastasi, 1988; Cronbach, 1979). The most complete source of information on a particular test is usually the test manual.

Administering. Test administration is usually standardized by the developers of the test. Manual instructions need to be followed in order to make a valid comparison of an individual's score with the test's norm group. Non-standardized tests used in counseling are best given under controlled circumstances. This allows the counselor's experience with the test to become an internal norm. Issues of individual versus group administration need consideration as well. The clients and the purpose for which they are being tested will contribute to decisions about group testing.

Scoring. Scoring of tests follows the instructions provided in the test manual. The counselor is sometimes given the option of having the test machine scored rather than hand scored. Both the positive and negative aspects of this choice need to be considered. It is usually believed that test scoring is best handled by a machine because it is free from bias.

Interpreting. The interpretation of test results is usually the area which allows for the greatest flexibility within the testing process. Depending upon the counselor's theoretical point of view and the extent of the test manual guidelines, interpretation may be brief and superficial, or detailed and explicitly theory based (Tinsley & Bradley, 1986). Because this area allows for the greatest flexibility, it is also the area with the greatest danger of misuse. Whereas scoring is best done by a bias-free machine, interpretation by machine is often too rigid. What is needed is the experience of a skilled test user to individualize the interpretation of results.

Communicating. Feedback of test results to the client completes the formal process of testing. Here, the therapeutic skills of counselors come fully into play (Phelps, 1974). The counselor uses verbal and nonverbal interaction skills to convey messages to clients and to assess their understanding of it.

Issues in Testing

Confidentiality. The ethical and legal restrictions on what may be disclosed from counseling apply to the use of tests as much as to other private information shared between client and counselor. The trust issue, which is inherent in confidentiality, is relevant to every aspect of testing. No information can be shared outside the relationship without the full consent of the client. Information is provided to someone outside the relationship only after the specifics to be used from the testing are fully disclosed to the client. These specifics include the *when*, *what*, and *to whom* of the disclosure. The purpose of disclosure is also shared with the client and what the information will be used for is clearly spelled out.

Issues of confidentiality are best discussed with the client before conducting any test administration. There should be no surprises when the counselor asks, at a later time, for permission to share test results. Clients who are fully informed, before testing takes place, about the issue of confidentiality in relation to testing are more active participants in the counseling process.

Counselor Preparation. Tests are only as good as their construction, proper usage and the preparation of the counselor intending to use them. The skills and competencies counselors need for using tests in practice are to:

- Understand clearly the intended purpose of a test.
- Be aware of the client's needs regarding the test to be given.
- Have knowledge about the test, its validity, reliability, and the norm group for which it was developed.

Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse
2108 School of Education, The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1259 (313) 764-9492

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC®

CG 021500

- Have personally taken the test before administering it.
- Have been supervised in administering, scoring, interpreting, and communicating results of the tests to be given.

Supervision in the practice of providing testing services ideally encompasses all of the above areas of concern. This supervision needs to be conducted by a knowledgeable practitioner with experience in using tests in clinical practice.

Client Involvement in the Testing Process. Throughout the process of using tests in counseling, questions about the client's involvement need to be considered. Will the client have a full and equal partnership with the counselor in deciding on the purpose for which the testing will be done? Will the client have a say in selecting the specific test to be administered? Will the client's opinion have a bearing on the interpretation of the test results?

Counseling has developed in recent years into a humanistic partnership in problem solving and growth. Consistent with this development is the client's participation in decisions regarding all aspects of the counseling relationship. Testing needs to be included here. The counselor uses developed counseling skills to determine client readiness for participation in decision making. Counseling skills will also help determine the client's ability to receive and comprehend results from the testing. In this regard, clients need to realize that tests are no more than instruments for furnishing information about themselves, as well as a guide for the counseling process and future decision making.

The issues of client involvement in the testing process are not clear-cut. Individual assessment of client readiness needs to precede test usage. The personal counseling skills of the practitioner are essential to the entire process.

Computerized Testing. Many of the major tests are now available in a computerized format. This format allows the administration and scoring of the test to occur almost simultaneously. Despite the access to computers in testing, clients continue to need a counselor ready to assist in answering questions that may arise. Counselors need to keep in mind that most tests were not normed using a computer format and that this may affect comparisons of individual scores to the available norms.

Ethics. Standards for the ethical use of tests and assessment instruments are given by both the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD). These standards spell out the considerations to take into account when utilizing tests in practice. It needs to be remembered that the primary purpose of using tests in counseling is the information they will provide to the client. Clients will then be better prepared for making decisions about meaningful changes in their lives.

Conclusion

Confidentiality, counselor preparation, computer testing, and client involvement are all issues within the ethical realm. Ultimately, test use by counselors must be seen as an adjunct to the entire counseling process. Test results provide descriptive and objective data which help the counselor to assist clients better in making the choices that will affect their lives. In order to make the best use of available tests in a counseling relationship, the process of testing and the issues which surround the process must be examined.

Resource Documents

Anastasi, A. (1988). *Psychological testing* (6th ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Corey, G., Corey, M. S., & Callanan, P. (1984). *Issues & ethics in the helping professions* (2nd ed.). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Cronbach, L. J. (1979). *Essentials of psychological testing* (4th ed.). New York: Harper & Row.

Goldman, L. (1971). *Using tests in counseling* (2nd ed.). Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear Publishing.

Phelps, W. R. (1974). *Communicating test results: A training guide. Final report.* Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service. (ED 134 853)

Thompson, D. L. (1986). Using microcomputer-based assessment in career counseling. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 23*(2), 50-56. (EJ 338 635)

Tinsley, H. E. A., & Bradley, R. W. (1986). Test interpretation. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 64*(7), 462-466. (EJ 333 980)

Underhill, J. (Ed.). (1975). *Skills for adult guidance educators. Package 11: Selecting assessment instruments.* Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Lab. (ED 192 141)

Robert M. Hoover, M.S.N., R.N.
Doctoral Candidate in Counseling
University of Toledo

1988

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. R188062011. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.